Nation-building Initiatives of the Olusegun Obasanjo Administration in the Fourth Republic, 1999-2007

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Abstract

For much of its existence, Nigeria was governed by the military. From 1960 to 2007, a total of forty-seven years, the military ruled for twenty-nine years. The remaining eighteen years was taken up by civilian rule. The search for a functional and cohesive Nigeria was a constant leitmotiv that ran throughout the period. This search is what has been termed nation-building. The federal government of Nigeria was confronted with important nation-building challenges between 1999 and 2007. Some of these nation-building challenges are those of democracy, corruption, federalism and aggressive ethno-regionalism. By 1999, when Nigeria's Fourth Republic was inaugurated, most of these nation-building challenges were yet to be resolved. When Chief Olusegun Obasanjo became the first civilian president in the Fourth Republic in 1999, he was confronted with the task of creating a functional and cohesive Nigerian polity. Thus, the central questions that this paper addresses are:

1. What are the mechanisms the Olusegun Obasanjo administration used to tackle Nigeria's nation-building challenges between 1999 and 2007?

2. What are the specific programmes the administration used in the nation-building process?

3. What are the nation-building challenges that confronted Nigeria between 1999 and 2007?

Keywords: Nigeria, Nation-building, fourth republic, Obasanjo, challenges.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria became an independent state in 1960. At independence, the country contained about 250 ethnic groups with over 350 spoken languages (Almond, *et al*., 2004). This ethno-cultural heterogeneity has made the task of building a viable, functional and cohesive polity an uphill task for the different administrations that has ruled the country since 1960. From 1960 to 2007, a period of some forty-seven years, the different Nigerian administrations had been confronted with the following nation-building challenges: federalism, corruption, autarky, democracy, governance, aggressive ethno-regionalism and religion. The inability of the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) to effectively resolve these challenges has impacted negatively on the nation-building process in the country.

Adewunmi Falode has argued that the FGN used four mechanisms to tackle the country's nation-building challenges between 1960 and 2007. Falode called these mechanisms conceptual, praetorian, institutional and constitutional mechanisms (Falode, 2012). Constitutional mechanism simply means the use of specific provisions in the Nigerian constitution in the nation-building process. Institutional mechanism means the creation of structures and organisations that help in the integration of the Nigerian society. Conceptual mechanism is the use of ideas and ideals in the nation-building process. While, praetorian mechanism is the use of military edicts and decrees in the nation-building process. The different civilian and military administrations that governed Nigeria made extensive use of these mechanisms to resolve the country's nation-building challenges. For example, General Yakubu Gowon, 1966-1975, established the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in 1973 through the institutional mechanism. The NYSC is meant to foster greater societal integration among Nigerian youths. Moreover, General Ibrahim Babangida used the constitutional mechanism to create the 1989 Constitution for the aborted Third Republic (Falode, 2012). The Constitution was designed to tackle such nation-building challenges as religion, federalism, aggressive ethno-regionalism, democracy and governance.

It could be seen that in Nigeria, nation-building has a long antecedent. Nigeria's ethno-cultural diversity, and the accompanying challenges this has created for the country since independence in 1960, ensured that nation-building is a permanent feature on Nigeria's socio-economic and political terrain. Thus, the nation-building initiatives of the Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's administration should be viewed from this perspective.

2. CHIEF OLUSEGUN OBASANJO'S CIVILIAN ADMINISTRATION, 1999-2007: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

On May 29, 1999, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo became Nigeria's second elected executive president following the successful transition programme of General Abdulsalami Abubakar. This hand-over effectively marked the beginning of Nigeria's Fourth Republic (Olurode and Anifowoshe, 2004). Olusegun Obasanjo was the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presidential candidate. Obasanjo also rode to a second term presidency in 2003 on the back of the same political party (Anifowoshe and Babawale, 2003). Obasanjo's eight years tenure as president has been the longest period of civilian rule in Nigeria's history, yet. The Obasanjo administration conducted two federal elections between 1999 and 2007. The first was conducted in 2003, at the end of which Obasanjo was reelected on the platform of the PDP as Nigeria's president. The second was conducted in 2007 and Umaru Yar'adua, the PDP presidential candidate, was elected as Nigeria's president. The two federal elections conducted were mired in controversy. This is because there was rigging on an unprecedented scale in Nigeria's electoral history. There was widespread intimidation, fraud, corruption and political assassinations during the campaigns leading up to both elections. The conduct of the two elections and the flawed results produced blighted the administration's legacy. And, it ensured that the unresolved challenges of democracy, governance, federalism and aggressive ethno-regionalism, which were a holdover from the country's military interregnum, impacted negatively on the state's efforts in building a viable, democratic and functional Nigeria.

Although, more than thirty political parties registered to contest the 2003 presidential elections, the elections itself was a two-man contest between

Obasanjo of the PDP and Alhaji Muhammadu Buhari of the ANPP (Anifowoshe, 2003). At the end the elections, INEC declared Chief Olusegun Obasanjo the winner. Buhari refused to accept the results and headed for the courts (Abubakar, 2007). It took the intervention of the Nigerian Supreme Court before Obasanjo's administration could be legitimated (Isa and Zakari, 2008). The same scenario was played out during the 2007 presidential elections. In spite of the more than forty political parties that participated in the elections, it was essentially a two-party race between the PDP and the ANPP. The 2007 presidential elections were also characterized with massive vote rigging and various electoral malfeasances. At the end of the presidential polls, some international observers even adjured it to be the worst in Nigeria's electoral history (Campbell, 2011). Just as he did at the end of the 2003 presidential elections, Buhari litigated. It took the intervention of the supreme court of Nigeria before Umaru Yar'Adua's election could be validated as being authentic.

Obasanjo carried-out extensive socio-economic and political programmes during the life of his administration between 1999 and 2007. Obasanjo's political policies were designed to broaden and deepen Nigeria's democracy. The administration's existence was conditioned on the 1999 Constitution that has within it such concepts as federalism, rule of law, accountability, good governance, transparency and due process. The administration set out from the outset to tackle the myriad of structural problems that afflicted Nigeria's federal political system. Obasanjo's major aim was to create political institutions that will strengthen Nigeria's democratic base and ensure its sustenance in the longer term. This was the rationale behind the administration's use of the constitutional provisions, such as the federal character principle and principle of fiscal federalism; and, the use of the concepts of zoning, rotational presidency and power-sharing. These are all tools the administration used between 1999 and 2007 to ensure that the inherent structural and institutional defects in Nigeria's federalism are corrected. For example, the concepts of zoning, federal character principle and power-sharing characterized the Obasanjo's administration between 1999 and 2007. These principles apportioned major political posts within the federation to specific individuals within the six geo-political zones. This was what led to the emergence of Obasanjo as the presidential candidate, Atiku

Abubakar as vice-presidential candidate, David Mark as senate president, and Dimeji Bankole as the speaker of the House of Representatives in the second term of Obasanjo's presidency between 2003 and 2007. Indeed, it was the principle of rotational presidency, another plank of the Obasanjo administration between 1999 and 2007, that ensured the emergence of Shehu Musa Yar' Adua as the presidential candidate of the PDP in 2007 (Campbell, 2011).

In trying to ensure Nigeria's economic survival and tackle the challenge of corruption, the administration launched National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (SEEDS) and Local Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (LEEDS). The three concepts formed the bridgehead of the administration's socio-economic reform package between 2003 and 2007 (Rustad, 2008). NEEDS was a hydra-headed concept meant to tackle the challenges of corruption, self-sufficiency, poverty, privatization and deregulation. For example, the administration used the NEEDS concepts to increase the telephone base in the country from below one million in 1999 to over thirty-eight million by 2007. Under the NEEDS initiative, the Nigerian banking sector that was going moribund was giving a new lease of life with the successful consolidation exercise of the administration in 2005. More importantly, the administration paid off a substantial portion of the foreign debt Nigeria owed to the Paris Club in 2006 (Chiakwelu, 2012).

Moreover, corruption was the bane of the Obasanjo administration between 1999 and 2007. Official corruption at the federal, state and local government levels defined the administration. For example, it was during Obasanjo's administration that Tafa Balogun, the former inspector general of police, Patricia Etteh, one time leader of the House of Representative, Adolphus Wabara, the president of the senate and even Obasanjo's vice-president Atiku Abubakar, were accused of one form of official corruption or the other. To tackle the high incidences of corruption in his administration, Obasanjo created two important institutions, the ICPC and EFCC in 2000 and 2004 respectively (Nwankwu, 2008). These two institutions, especially the EFCC, played crucial roles throughout the lifespan of the Obasanjo administration. Though, it must be remarked that the EFCC was

seen, not as an impartial corruption fighting unit, but as a tool the Obasanjo administration used to muzzle and silence every form of political opposition and dissent to the administration (Campbell, 2011). Instances of the abuse of the power of the EFCC abound throughout Obasanjo's administration between 1999 and 2007. Indeed, it was effectively used to intimidate politicians, both from the PDP and the opposition political parties, who were against Obasanjo's Third-Term project as from 2006. As a matter of fact, Obasanjo used the EFCC to destroy Atiku Abubakar's chances of succeeding him as president in the 2007 presidential election (Campbell, 2011). Abubakar, Obasanjo's vice-president opposed his self-succession bid.

Religious tensions remained high throughout Obasanjo's term. The Sharia controversy was a good example of this. In 1999, Zamfara state governor, Alhaji Ahmed Yerima introduced Sharia, the Islamic law code, into the state (Odeh, 2010). Other northern states followed Zamfara's example in quick succession. This action created two important dilemmas for the Obasanjo administration. The first was the unconstitutionality of using a religious law to govern some of the states in a secular Nigeria. The second was how to establish the status of Christians living in northern states now using the Sharia. The president was constrained to act because he is a Christian from the southern part of Nigeria. An important consequence of the failure of the administration to effectively spell-out the place of Sharia in a secular Nigerian polity led to the relocation from Abuja to London of the Miss World Beauty Pageant in 2002 (Korieh and Nwokedi, 2000). Obasanjo was unable to defuse religious tensions in his eight years as president (Korieh and Nwokedi, 2000).

Ethnic tensions also ran high in the country during Obasanjo's administration. Ethnic militias became very active during Obsanjo's administration. In the southeast, Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), which was founded by Ralph Nwazuruike in 1999, campaigned actively for the reassertion of the state of Biafra (Ukiwo, 2009). MASSOB believed that the Igbos is yet to be fully reintegrated into the Nigerian state and thus secession was the only option to ensure their survival. In the southwest, the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) became a political torn in the side of the

administration. Throughout Obasanjo's administration, the OPC had an adversarial relationship with it. Part of the reason was the perception of the OPC that Obasanjo's policies were never designed to favour the Yoruba race (UNHCR, Canada, 2000). The refusal of the administration to post-humously recognize Chief Moshood Abiola as an important figure in the country's democratization process and its refusal to also recognize June 12, 1993 as democracy day alienated the OPC from the administration.

In the Niger Delta, the fight of the Ogoni's and other ethnic minorities for control over oil resources and an end to the pollution of their territories took a decidedly violent turn during the administration's second-term. Different militias came-up in the region to fight for and defend the rights of the minorities in the Niger Delta. The most publicized and heavily militarized of these groups was the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) (Crisis Group, 2006). MEND took political violence to an unprecedented level never seen since the independence of Nigeria in 1960. The activities of MEND in the Niger Delta such as kidnapping of foreign oil workers and destruction of oil installations affected oil production and thus the revenue base of the federal government (Crisis Group, 2006). In order to arrest the deteriorating situation in the Niger Delta, the state adopted a two-track approach. Obasanjo established the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) to meet some of the socio-economic aspirations of the people of the Delta. At the same time, the administration established the Joint Task Force, a specialist military unit, to flush out the militants out of the Niger Delta (Crisis Group, 2006).

The third-term project defined the last term of the Obasanjo administration. Starting from late 2005, the administration began a series of political manoeuvrings that would have culminated in the eventual elongation of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's tenure into a third term. Obasanjo tried to achieve this by altering the specific provisions of the 1999 Constitution that placed a two-term limit on the presidency (Campbell, 2011) When the plans of the administration became known, Civil Society Groups (CSGs), opposition political parties, members of the senate and house of representatives, and even Obasanjo's vice-president, Atiku Abubakar, all opposed the move. On May 16, 2006, when the

motion for the amendment of the Constitution was tabled at the senate, it was defeated (Campbell, 2011). Thus, since Obasanjo could not obtain the constitutional backing necessary for his tenure elongation, there was no way he could then run for the presidency. By 2007, Obasanjo conducted the second federal elections of his presidency. The PDP presidential candidate, Umaru Yar'Adua emerged the winner. Umaru Yar' Adua was duly sworn-in as the second civilian president in the Fourth Republic in May 2007.

3. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION: NATION-BUILDING

Nation-building is referred to as the process whereby people transfer their commitment and loyalty from smaller ethnic groups, villages or petty principalities to the larger central political system (Almond, *et al*., 2004). The process of nation-building is the cultivation of a people of political attitudes, beliefs and values (Smith, 1971). Its emphasis is on the congruity of cultural and political identities (Rokkan, 1973). Within the Nigerian context, it is the progressive acceptance by members of the polity of the legitimacy and the necessity for a central government, and the identification with the central government as the symbol of the nation (Elaigwu, 1985). This is the vertical dimension to nation-building. The horizontal dimension involves the acceptance of the other members of the civic body as equal members of a corporate nation. In Nigeria, during the Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's administration, the vertical dimension held true.

The term 'nation-building' came into vogue among historically oriented political scientist in the 1950s and 1960s. Its main proponents included such leaders of the American academic community such as Karl Deutsch, Charles Tilly and Richard Bendix (Folk, 2011). Nation-building theory was primarily used to describe the processes of national integration and consolidation that led up to the establishment of the modern nation-state. This is distinct from the various forms of traditional states such as feudal and dynastic states, church states and empires. The term covers conscious strategies initiated by state leaders, as well as, unplanned societal change (Friedrich, 1963). It has also been described as an indispensable   tool for detecting, describing and analyzing the "macro historical

and sociological dynamics" that have produced the modern states. Nation-building is, on the one hand, a process of socio-political development which allows loosely knitted communities to become a common society with a nation-state corresponding to it (Hippler, 2005). It also connotes the different dimensions through which diverse segment of the society is fused into a functional whole. It has within it economic integration, cultural integration, political centralisation, bureaucratic control and democratisation, and establishment of common citizenship (Hippler, 2005).

There are three elements of nation-building: ideology, integration of society and functional state apparatus (Hippler, 2005). As regard ideology, nation-building will only be successful if it stems from an integrative ideology. Fundamental restructuring of politics and society requires special legitimation with regard to justification of policy, as well as, social mobilization for its ends. This is the important purpose that ideology serves in the process of nation-building. The second crucial element in the nation-building process is what has been termed societal integration. This simply means the integration of a society from the loosely associated groups that existed previously. For instance, Hausas, Yorubas and Ibos must be convinced that they belong to a common nation and this notion must also be founded in the social reality. To achieve this, the pattern of communication between the social groups will be intensified to the extent that communication does not principally take place within the groups. That is, the pattern of communication will be inter-groups rather than intra-groups

Finally, the third element in the nation-building process involves the development of a functional state apparatus that can control its national territory. This implies that the corresponding society has constituted itself as a political society with its own self-awareness. In this way, the state becomes the political organisational form of a society that is able to act.

For the sake of intelligibility and analytical coherence, the various nation-building measures adopted by the state in the two terms of the Obasanjo's presidency will be taken together. The chapter will carry out an unbroken historical analysis of the measures the state injected into the nation-building

process between 1999 and 2007. Various nation-building challenges confronted the state during the first quarter of the Fourth Republic. Some of the more important ones are the challenges of federalism, aggressive ethno-regionalism, democracy, autarky, governance and religion. In tackling these challenges and then trying to create a viable, functional, cohesive and democratic Nigeria, the state made use of constitutional, institutional and conceptual mechanisms. The state used each, and sometimes combined these mechanisms to tackle specific aspects of the nation-building challenges that confronted Nigeria from 1999 to 2007.

4. INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM USED BY THE OBASANJO ADMINISTRATION IN THE NATION-BUILDING PROCESS

The following institutions were set up by the Obasanjo's administration to tackle some of the nation-building challenges that faced Nigeria between 1999 and 2007.

(i)   The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC)

(ii)   Niger Delta development Commission (NDDC)

(iii)   National Political Reform Conference (NPRC)

(i) Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC)

In tackling the challenge of corruption in Nigeria during the Fourth republic, the Obasanjo administration established the EFFC and ICPC between 2000 and 2004 (Okoosi-Simbine, 2011). Corruption is an important bane of the various nation-building efforts in Nigeria since 1967. The need to eradicate corruption, for instance, featured prominently as a reason for General Murtala Mohammed's coup in 1975 (Okoosi-Simbine, 1993); it pervaded and consequently led to the destruction of the Second Republic; and ran unchecked and unhindered during General Sanni Abacha's regime between 1993 and 1998. At the inception of the democratic administration, President Obasanjo declared:

> Corruption, the greatest single bane of our
> society today will be tackled head on at all
> levels… and ….stamped out (Owolabi,
> 2007).

In furtherance of this drive, the state enacted the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act in 2000 under the umbrella of the ICPC; and the EFCC Act 2002 (Owolabi, 2007). These Acts served as the tools for identifying, investigating and convicting offenders. These Acts also empowered the two agencies to seize assets, freeze accounts and set-up specialized autonomous anti-corruption agencies apart from the federal police (Bola, 2006). The particular facets of corruption that the two agencies were designed to tackle include advance free fraud also known as '419'; embezzlement of public funds, economic frauds, misappropriation of public funds, and political corruption (Sardan, 1999). Political corruption was highly prevalent during Obasanjo's administration. It relates, among others, to the misuse of authority, the use of governmental powers for illegitimate private gain and conflict of interest (Zero Tolerance, 2006). The Obasanjo administration effectively used the two agencies, especially the EFCC, to bring the issues of corruption to the public sphere. The activities of the EFCC demonstrated the efforts of the state toward building a functional and viable polity through the impactful activities of the Institution. For example, the efforts of the EFCC had resulted in the return of over five billion naira in stolen funds back to the Nigerian state and the prosecution of over eighty individuals for corruption charges by 2006 (Falola and Heaton, 2008). Over the course of 2006, four state governors, Rashidi Ladoja of Oyo state, Ayo Fayose of Ekiti state, Joshua Dariye of Plateau state and Peter Obi of Anambra were impeached by their state legislatures over allegations of corruption by the EFCC (Economist, 2007; Zero Tolerance, 2006). The former Inspector General of Police, Tafa Balogun, was dismissed from office, prosecuted, tried and jailed for corruption in 2005 through the efforts of the EFCC (Vanguard, 2005). And in May 2007, the United States removed Nigeria from its money laundering watch list (Alli, 2010).

However, the EFCC, ICPC and other anti-corruption agencies failed to make appreciable progress against corruption towards the tail end of the administration because, among other things, the state personalized and de-institutionalized the anti-corruption programme. More cripplingly, the constitutional protection, the immunity clause of the 1999 Constitution, made it impossible for the agencies to pursue a vigorous anti-corruption initiative against some elected public officials.

(ii) Niger Delta Delta Development Commission (NDDC) 2000

The NDDC was particularly established to tackle the challenge of aggressive ethno-regionalism in the south-eastern region during the Fourth Republic. It was created by the Obasanjo administration in June 2000 to review and prescribe ways in which the federal government could economically develop the Niger Delta (Falola and Geneva, 2009). The state built infrastructures and encouraged investments in the region through various schemes located within the NDDC. NDDC was also established to tackle the problem of youth restiveness in the region. Youth restiveness in the region had not only threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria, but it further impacted negatively on the oil-extracting and exporting activities of the multi-national corporations in the region between 1999 and 2007. This assumed a dangerous dimension with the formation of ethnic militias that threatened the very existence of the Nigerian state. Such ethnic militias include Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF). This then was the backdrop to the establishment of the NDDC.

(iii) National Political Reform Conference (NPRC), 2005

In order to effectively tackle the challenges of federalism and aggressive ethno-regionalism that threatened the corporate existence of the country, the Obasanjo's administration set up the NPRC in 2005. The NPRC was created to reach a consensus on aspects of the federal structure, resource control, devolution of power to federating units and explicit recognition of ethnic nationalities as a means of finding a lasting solutions to perennial unrests in various parts of the

federation between 1999 and 2007 (Inuwa, 2010). Memberships of the NPRC cuts across the federation. It was done in such a way as to reflect the federal political arrangement in Nigeria. For example, fifty of it members were nominated by the president, two hundred and eighteen by state governors and eighty-six selected from different groups from across the federation.

The NPRC submitted its report to the presidency by July 2005. However, the NPRC failed to significantly resolve the challenges of federalism, distribution and aggressive ethno-regionalism due to two important reasons. The first was the administration's over-responsiveness to partisan demands from pressure groups that transformed the conference from a national dialogue into a sectional debate (Aluko, 2005). And secondly, the intransigence of some ethnic groups, like the Niger Delta delegates, that felt the NPRC could not adequately cater for their socio-economic aspirations (Inuwa, 2010).

5. CONCEPTUAL MECHANISM USED BY THE OBASANJO'S ADMINISTRATION IN THE NATION-BUILDING PROCESS

Three important challenges that confronted the civilian administration in its nation-building drives were those of federalism, democracy and aggressive ethno-regionalism. In trying to tackle these, the state resorted to the use of the following concepts:
(i) Power-Sharing
(ii) Zoning
(iii)National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)

(i) Power-Sharing

The concept of power sharing implies a consensual arrangement in which candidates for political offices are chosen by the community without much regard for experience, competence and continuity in office (Inuwa, 2010). It means a geographical location of political leadership in such a way that enhances the possibility of different geo-political entities that made up the country the chance of occupying a political office (Jacob, 2006). The concept has within it

such other concepts as rotational presidency, rotational governor, rotational ministers and rotational commissioners. Power-sharing is not only an ethnic balancing formula, but also a region-equilibrating medium. Although, the idea of power sharing predates the Fourth Republic, it was a political arrangement the Obasanjo administration used extensively to tackle the challenges of democracy and federalism. With the distribution of the federation into geo-political zones during the Fourth Republic, the administration ensured that access to political offices, especially at the central or federal level was based on the principles of power-sharing. For example, toward the tail end of his second-term presidency, president Obasanjo ensured, based on the principle of power-sharing, that the presidential political office was given to the north-west, that of the vice-presidency to the south-south and the presidency of the senate to the north-central (middle-belt). This was what led to the emergence of the presidency of Umaru Yar'Adua and Goodluck Jonathan in 2007.

(ii) Zoning

Zoning, which is an element of power-sharing, is an informal arrangement in which the states in Nigeria are aggregated into zones or regions for the purpose of allocating office (Jacob, 2006). The process also corresponds to consociationalism, elite coalition and proportional representation (Orji, 2008). The goal of all these measures is to ensure that persons from a few states or ethno-regional group do not dominate the government and that the president enjoy broad support. In the case of Nigeria, it connotes the division of political offices to the six geographical zones (Tamuno, 2003). The main purpose of zoning is to make sure that the different offices are rotated amongst the regions. And, also that power would shift from one region to another thereby hindering one region from dominating in terms of power (Rustad, 2008). This was the idea that informed the official recognition of the six geo-political zones by the Obasanjo's administration. The zones are south-west, south-east, south-south, north-central, north-east and north-west.

(iii) National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (Needs), 2004

NEEDS, that was launched at the beginning of the second-term of the Obasanjo's administration in 2003, was an important plank of the administration's reform programmemes (Rustad, 2008). NEEDS was multifaceted. It was designed to tackle the challenges of autarky, distribution and that of corruption (Adejumobi, 2011). NEEDS was conceived by the administration as Nigeria's home grown poverty reduction strategy (Ifamose, 2010). The four key areas that the programme focused on included value re-orientation, poverty reduction, employment generation and wealth creation (NPC, 2004). NEEDS had four sub-groups. They are public service reforms; economic reforms through macroeconomics stability and accelerated privatization of the economy; institutional reforms and strengthening and social reforms through transparency, accountability and anti-corruption (Alli, 2010). The impact of NEEDS on the Nigerian economy and by extension, socio-economic lives of the country was overwhelming. For example, under its economic and empowerment agenda, NEEDS increased the number of telephones in the country from below 1 million in 1999 to over thirty-eight million by April 2007 (Ifamose, 2010). Moreover, the banking sector was another area touched by NEEDS' reform. In 2005, a consolidation exercise, instigated by NEEDS in the banking sector, led to the merger of Nigeria's 89 banks into 25, each with a minimum capital base of 25 billion naira (Alli, 2010). And more importantly, NEEDS spearheaded the establishment of such agencies as Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit (BMPIU), the due process office in the presidency, the EFCC and ICPC (Adejumobi, 2011).

6. CONSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM USED BY THE OBASANJO ADMINISTRATION IN THE NATION-BUILDING PROCESS

In tackling the challenges of federalism, democracy and aggressive ethno-regionalism, the state made extensive use of the constitutional provisions of the 1999 Constitution. Two key constitutional mechanisms that were used are:

(i) Federal Character Principles (FCP)

(ii) Principle of Fiscal Federalism

The two mechanisms provided some level of economic and political stability within the Nigerian state in the Fourth Republic. The mechanisms ensured that economic stability was maintained through an equitable distribution and allocation of the federal resources to all the federating units. Besides, political stability was guaranteed by the FCP through the equilibrated distribution of political power and offices among all the states of the federation.

(i) Federal Character Principle

According to section 14(3) of the 1979 constitution of Nigeria, the federal character principle was created to ensure that:

The composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conducts of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria.

These provisions were replicated in the same sections of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria. The expectation of the federal character principle was that it would pave the way for a federal government that would be all-inclusive of all segments of the federation thereby assuring a stable federal polity. This was the rationale behind the establishment of the Federal Character Commission (FCC) by the Obasanjo administration in 2002 (Muhammad, 2007). The FCC was an executive agency specifically created to implement the federal character principle in the 1963 and 1979 constitutions, respectively. Thus, the federal character principle was aimed at creating a sense of belonging and participation by the diverse ethnic groups and political groupings within the Nigerian polity.

As a nation-building tool, the Obasanjo administration deployed the principle in its efforts to resolve the challenges of federalism, democracy and aggressive ethno-regionalism that confronted the state between 1999 and 2007. The administration used it as the basis for the creation of a more cohesive and purposeful national leadership out of the culturally diverse ethnic groups (Odofin, 2005). This was what characterized the allocation of a number of vacancies into federal institutions in the Fourth Republic. The policy however

failed to effectively tackle these challenges because, among other things, it was poorly exercised by the state. For example, due to the shoddy implementation of the principle by the FCC, the FCP made Nigerians to be more aware of their communal background than build a common feeling of loyalty to the federation (Nkolika, 2007). Indeed, the political elites shenanigans undermined the potency of the policy in terms of advancing the course of federalism and nation building in Nigeria (Odofin, 2005).

7. CONCLUSION

The end of military rule in 1999 ushered in the fourth Republic in Nigeria. Prior to this period, the different administrations that ruled Nigeria had tried and failed to turn it into a cohesive and functional political entity. This failure was not due to a lack of commitment on the parts of the administrations. It has a lot more to do with the multi-faceted nation-building challenges that confronted Nigeria because of its socio-cultural heterogeneity. Between 1999 and 2007, the civilian administration of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo devoted considerable efforts toward the resolution of these nation-building challenges. The study has shown that the administration made extensive use of the constitutional, institutional and conceptual mechanisms in its nation-building efforts. By the end of the administration in 2007, Obasanjo has succeeded in jump-starting the process that his administration believed would eventually culminate in the creation of a viable, functional and cohesive Nigeria.

In trying to create a viable, functional and cohesive Nigeria, the Obasanjo administration was confronted with various nation-building challenges. These include the challenges of distribution, federalism, corruption and autarky. The Administration evolved different strategies to tackle these challenges. It ensured that the strategies it created were tailored to tackle specific nation-building challenges that confronted Nigeria during the lifespan of the administration. This, for instance, was what informed the creation of both the ICPC and EFCC to tackle the challenge of corruption in Nigeria between 1999 and 2007. It also informed the creation of NEEDS to tackle the challenge of autarky within the same period.

Going by the elements of nation-building earlier highlighted, a successful nation-building exercise requires three prerequisites. They are ideology, integration of society and a functional state apparatus. From the analysis, one can see that the Obasanjo's administration only succeeded in injecting one of these, a functional state apparatus, into the nation-building process. The failure of the Obasanjo's administration to create a sound ideology for its nation-building programmes impacted negatively on its overall efforts to create a functional Nigeria. Likewise, Obasanjo's inability to create an integrated Nigerian society somewhat diluted the effectiveness of the administration's nation-building programmes.

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